

# Oysters a growth industry

## Shellfish have economic, environmental benefits

By JUSTIN GHAEER, CLIPPER EDITOR  
JUSTIN@DUXBURYCLIPPER.COM

Oyster farming is a rapidly growing business in Duxbury, and the industry has environmental as well as economic benefits, according to a recent report.

However, a group put together to study the issue cautioned against expanding the oyster beds until the effects of the current harvesting can be further studied.

The Board of Selectmen may continue a moratorium on new oyster grants in Duxbury Bay, but those with existing grants will be allowed to expand their territory.

The moratorium was imposed in January of 2005, after the industry started to take off and the Board of Selectmen wanted to limit the areas where oysters are grown, said Ned Lawson at a recent Board of Selectmen meeting. The original plan was that the moratorium would last until an aquaculture management plan for the town was in place.

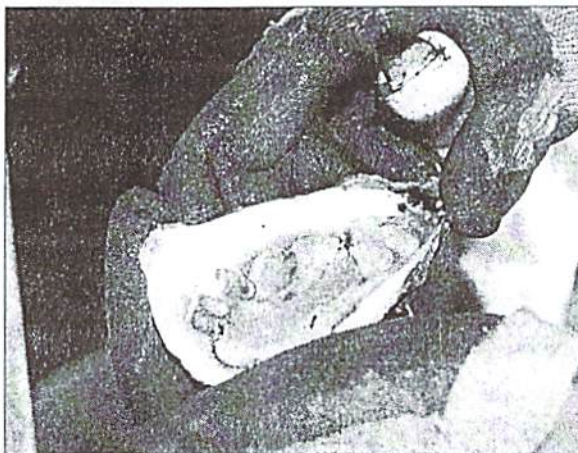
"The plan was meant to be done in six months, but it's taken four times that long," said Lawson, who was presenting a draft of the report, developed by an ad hoc committee consisting of members of the Shellfish Advisory Committee, the Duxbury Bay Management Commission, the Shellfish Growers Association and the Agricultural Commission.

The way oyster farming works is that a farmer applies for a license from the town, and the town assigns a parcel of land, or grant. There are a limited number of licenses available. There are currently 30 licensed aquaculture leaseholders in Duxbury, and their grants cover 70.67 acres, according to the report. Other shellfish, such as razor clams, are also harvested in the bay.

The report recommended continuing the moratorium.

"More time is still needed to evaluate the full future impact of the existing licenses," Lawson said.

However, he added that so far, the impact of oyster farming in Duxbury appears to be



Oysters farmers need to obtain a license from the town in order to grow the tasty shellfish. Although a recent report on the industry recommends against increasing the number of licenses in Duxbury Bay, it did suggest the town allow farmers to expand their grants up to three acres.

entirely positive.

"We see no evidence to any environmental impact — in fact, all the evidence points the other way," he said.

He referenced a recent effort to remove pollution from Duxbury harbor using oysters — oysters that came from Duxbury's growing cooperative Island Creek Oysters. Oysters can reduce nitrates in the water as well as sediment.

"All the evidence the report gathered suggested shellfish, specifically oysters, have a beneficial impact on both the variety of species in the bay and water quality," said Lawson.

There is an economic benefit as well, as the industry employs 30 full-time employees and another 30 seasonal workers.

Lawson also pointed out the growers, most under the umbrella of the Island Creek cooperative, have given back to Duxbury, donating oysters for community events and starting a scholarship for marine sciences.

"The industry has been generous to the community," he said. "They're obviously philanthropically inclined."

The report did notice that the industry's growth has to be weighed against several factors including parking and traffic at the harbor and the

other users of the bay, such as boating, kite boarding, rowing and fishing.

"Striking a delicate balance between these recreational activities and Duxbury's commercial activities, which include lobstering, fishing, wild shellfishing and aquaculture practices, is necessary," the report reads.

Although Lawson's committee did not recommend the creation of new licenses, it did recommend the current license holders be allowed to increase their grant to the town's allowed maximum of three acres. Many Duxbury oyster farmers only have beds of one or two acres. Lawson said the state law is for oyster beds to be a maximum of 10 acres.

He did say there was an original draft of the report that would have allowed the current grants to be increased to five acres, but added the committee wanted to see the impacts of this change first.

"Although the bay is quite large, the area of future expansion is practically limited," Lawson said.

Board of Selectmen Chairman Jon Witten wanted to make sure any move on the board's part was done at a public meeting, so the issue will be voted on at a meeting on Jan. 12.